

Relationship Mapping

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Introduction

Most important negotiations are with people or institutions with whom we have negotiated before and will negotiate again. In general, a strong working relationship empowers parties to deal appropriately with their differences. Any transaction should improve, rather than damage, parties' ability to work together again. This article describes the concept of "relationship mapping", a tool to better deal with relationships in a multiparty negotiation. The goal of this articles is to share the advantages and know-how of using this tool to influence decision-makers in complex negotiation settings.

The Strategic Challenge

Relationship mapping is a tool that has guaranteed success with situations where the negotiator is confronted with multiple parties who form a patchwork of interconnected relationships. These relationships, despite - or because of - their interconnectivity, have widely disparate interests. Negotiations and agreements with one party inevitably impact negotiations with others. Consequently, common agreement or consensus among all parties seems almost impossible, as no single agreement with one party can satisfy all key interests.

The Tactical Challenge

Faced with strategic challenge described above, relationship mapping assists in determining how to tactically approach a multiparty negotiation. It helps organize the order in which you will negotiate with each party. With this tool, you can establish guidelines to decide with whom you should negotiate first and to what end. These guidelines will allow you to put all the parties in a logical order that will increase your chance of getting what you want. It also helps you to deal with the uncertainties of a changing political landscape or concealed, inaccurate or vague information about players' interests, relationships, etc.

A Common Approach

In the absence of a solid relationship mapping, when big problems erupt in a multiparty negotiation, the normal reaction is usually to try to solve them with the biggest available concession or resort early to BATNA⁽¹⁾ - where one player can exert the most pressure immediately. These responses to complex problems tend to present unproductive consequences, such as a negative impact on working relationships and a failure to build a long-term, sustainable capacity to prevent or efficiently solve future problems.

An Alternative Approach

Relationship mapping allows the creation of an alternative approach to typical responses to crises. Through preparation, relationship mapping maximizes the value of negotiations by systematically organizing and clarifying the diffused and complex network of players. This organization and clarification can be done by sorting out players' motivations: their interests, BATNAs and key relationships. Once this is done, relationship mapping serves as an instrument to exploit or reengineer the network to increase the probability of short- and long-term success.

The Process (Overview)

The process of relationship mapping involves five steps, as follows.

- Clarify and prioritize *your own interests*;
- Identify all relevant *players*;
- Identify all *players' key interests*;
- Identify and characterize *relationships* among the players; and
- Plan and implement a *sequence of one-on-one negotiations* to leverage and/or reshape the relationship map to serve your interests - short- and long term.

A detailed, sequential description of these steps follows.

CLARIFY AND PRIORITIZE YOUR OWN INTERESTS

Interests are not positions; positions are individuals' or parties' demands. Underlying these positions are the reasons parties demand something: their needs, concerns, desires, hopes and fears. The better an agreement satisfies peoples' interests, the better the deal. In order to clarify your interests, although not necessarily through your positions.

Understanding what your many interests may be will help establish what you want from a negotiation.

One's interests may be divided into three temporal categories, as follows.

- Short-term interests (e.g., getting perishable off-loaded today);
- Mid-term interests (e.g., knowing you can get perishables off-loaded next month of next year); and
- Long-term interests (e.g., strategic vision, business plan, sustainable operating structure).

Knowing your interests may be different and that they can be categorized by time, business dynamics (e.g., shipping/transport; customs; distribution channels; supplies, etc.) or any other issue may help you identify and clarify them. After such categorization, the next step is to identify tensions among these interests and prioritize them. The result should be a list with your interests prioritized and arranged in a way that allows flexibility to bring them into a negotiation.

IDENTIFY THE RELEVANT PLAYERS

This step requires listing all relevant players, so that no one who will be influenced or affected by the outcome of the negotiation or its implementation is left out. Of course, this does not require that every single individual or group in the company needs to be listed, but do include all representative groups of interests, even if they are not directly related to the subject of the negotiation. This cautious measure will prevent "surprises" from happening in the middle of the negotiation. On the other hand, to list those affected does not necessarily mean that they are objectively important players, only that consideration of them is relevant when negotiations are conducted and they therefore should be identified. The relevancy of an organization or individual is measured subjectively by the party doing the mapping. By clarifying your interests in a negotiation beforehand, you can better define your goals for the negotiation and who will be involved in the process of achieving your goals, whether as allies or as obstacles. With this list, a diagram can be created illustrating all stakeholding groups and the individuals within them, other independent stakeholders and, finally, where you sit among those stakeholders. This diagram should give you a fairly good idea of everyone who is involved.

IDENTIFY THE PLAYERS' KEY INTERESTS

After listing all the relevant players, it is time to analyze them. As you clarified your interests at the beginning of this process, you should now do the same for each player. The same process may be followed here, although identifying other parties interests poses a different challenge. One suggestion is to assess the mapped players' key needs,

concerns, fears, etc., based on what you currently know about them and others in relationship positions, circumstances, etc. It also would be helpful to know their notions of success and expectations for the negotiation process, as well as their resources and capabilities. Then, in light of others' interests, alternatives and capabilities, review and refine your own interests and priorities.

In this process, it is important to beware of unquestioned assumptions based on cultural stereotypes and generalizations (including social, economic, political, religious, etc.). After double-checking the assessment of their interests to avoid these stereotypes and generalizations, players' key interests should be recorded on the diagram.

IDENTIFY AND CHARACTERIZE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG THE PARTIES

You have now determined who is relevant for your negotiation and what each party wants. We will start now to identify all existing relationships among the mapped parties. Some examples of these relationships are alliances, partnerships, business contacts, hierarchical structures, friendships, family connections, etc., between individuals, organizations or departments. Then we will analyze the nature of the relationships for different patterns (of deference, influence or antagonism). Finally, we will plot and label these relationships on the diagram to visually understand the complexity of the structure of the mapped relationships.

Professor James K. Sebenius of the Harvard Business School established the different relationship patterns mentioned above⁽²⁾. We will explain each one, but first call attention to the fact that this is just one of many ways to categorize relationship patterns. No one is forced to employ this model and its adaptation to every case. Indeed, it is important that whoever is doing the relationship mapping does not rely only on formal relationships. To make this mistake may transform your relationship mapping into a formal tool, with no applicability to reality. Instead, one should identify the real (and many times informal) patterns that govern relationships between parties.

DEFERENCE

Deference is a relationship pattern where Party A *will almost certainly do what* Party B does, or do what Party B advises, asks or directs Party A to do. In these cases, it is said that Party A defers to Party B's opinion or interest. There are many sources of deference, including personal respect or admiration, mentorship, sponsorship, political power, raw strength, seniority, expertise, status, reputation, etc. These patterns of deference may carry significant weights, and it may prove useful to include each in relationship mapping to build a more accurate model. One way to identify patterns of deference among mapped players is by asking: "Who, if anyone, defers to whom?". Note the flexibility of this tool: We can split patterns of deference into *authority* and *pressure*. Authority has a stronger and more formal influential power than pressure. The deference pattern had its players' positions switched in the relationship. Hence, if Party A will almost certainly do what

Party B does, advises, asks or directs Party A do, we say Party B has *authority* or *pressure* over Party A (instead of saying that Party A *defers* to Party B). In order to make the model more realistic, we can weight both authority and pressure from "1" to "3", where "3" represents more influence and "1" less influence⁽³⁾.

INFLUENCE

Influence is a relationship pattern where Party A *is likely to follow* Party B's lead, or do what Party B advises, asks or directs Party A to do. There are many sources of influence, including trust of judgment, best intentions, successful track record, shared interests, etc. Patterns of influence may carry different weights and, if it seems appropriate, they should be applied remembering that they are totally independent from patterns of deference. This independence allows one to properly weight different patterns of influence even if there is no difference between the patterns deference. Patterns of influence can be determined in relationship mapping by asking: "Who, if anyone, can help secure agreement with others?"

As an example, we can divide patterns of influence into *respect* and *collaboration* to better assess the nature of different relationships. Respect may or may have stronger influential power than collaboration. Party A, in the example above, would have party B's respect or collaboration, depending on the parties' level of interdependence. Once again, levels of influence can be given from "1" to "3" to patterns of respect and "collaboration".

ANTAGONISM

Antagonism is a relationship pattern where Party A *will not follow* Party B's lead, or do what Party B advises, asks or directs Party A to do. There are many sources of antagonism, including mistrust of judgment, intentions, unsuccessful track record, conflicting interests, etc. A means of identifying patterns of antagonism among mapped players is "Whose agreement, if anyone's, would preclude agreement with others?"

In addition to the different weightings that can be added to make the model more accurate ("1" through "3"), other patterns can be created, such as patterns of opposition. Opposition encompasses the characteristics of the patterns of antagonism, and includes a larger spectrum of reactions. In a pattern of opposition, a more radical reaction is expected from Party A, where whatever Party B's opinion on the matter, Party A will seek to have an opposite and conflicting view. More than merely antagonizing Party B, Party A also directly opposes Party B. If desired, one can further delineate between antagonism and opposition instead of lumping them together.

As one can see, there is a high degree of flexibility in this stage of relationship mapping. This allows a more customized model of the situation under analysis. The differences of a political or a business multi-party complex negotiation will be better taken into

consideration using the flexibility of this relationship mapping tool than would be the case with a more rigid or structured model.

IDENTIFYING COALITIONS

Now that the players and relationships have been mapped, you have enough information to start identifying the various coalitions that exist or can exist. To do so, you first need to identify groups of players (with shared or dovetailed interests) with whom you would like or need to reach agreements. These agreements should be made in a way that forwards your interests directly and improves your BATNA or worsens that of your opposition. No agreement should be made without it having a clear purpose in your coalition-building strategy. Simply to include more people in your group will not necessarily increase your power; to the contrary, it may well dilute the power of your coalition or weaken it with internal disputes.

To avoid this and other problems it can be helpful to identify groups of players who may undermine your interests, worsen your BATNA or improve other parties' BATNAs. These players should be treated in a very careful manner: perhaps isolating them from potential allies or adding them to your coalition to better control them. The manner in which they can be isolated or assimilated will vary depending on each party, its interests, options, alternatives and long-term relationship with you and other parties.

To help identify the parties in relation to their coalition potential, you may want to identify the parties who can help your interests in three different ways:

1. Who, if anyone, has the capacity to further your interests?

- Do they share your interests?;
- Do they have dovetailing interests?;
- Do they have opposing interests?; or
- Are their interests not directly related at all?

2. Who, if anyone, lacks the capacity to directly further your interests, but:

- may share your interests?;
- may have dovetailing interests?;
- may have opposing interests?; or
- has no apparently related interests at all?

3. Who, if anyone, has the capacity to directly hinder your interests, but:

- may share your interests?;
- may have dovetailing interests?;
- may have opposing interests?; or
- has no apparently related interests at all?

ANALYZING THE RELATIONSHIP MAP

After identifying possible coalitions, analyze them and the relationship map. The best way to do this may be by asking yourself some questions as you survey the relationship map.

- Which player's or players' agreements will advance your short-, mid- and long-term interests?
- What are their key interests?
- What are their BATNAs to agreements that serve your interests?
- Are they part of a pattern of deference, influence or antagonism (or any other)?
- Could existing or potential coalitions effect their BATNAs? Your BATNA?

This analysis will aid in locating parties on the relationship map; understanding their possibilities in the negotiation *vis-à-vis* yours; and realizing their interactions and potentials to benefit your goals. This can be achieved by identifying potential or existing links between parties.

- Who may be able to meet another's interests?;
- Who may influence others, perhaps to the point of deference?; and
- Who may facilitate, improve or worsen another's BATNA?

Once this is done, it may be good practice to check some of the steps made before getting to this point. The final relationship map often gives interesting insights about the different approaches to each relationship that could be adjusted when reviewing prior steps of the map-building process.

Plan and Implement a Sequence of One-on-one Negotiations

Finally, use interests, BATNAs, and patterns of deference, influence and antagonism to create an optimal negotiation *sequence*. Remembering that the sequence can profit information arising from relationship mapping can help determine a chosen strategy. Each negotiation in a sequence should help you achieve your final goal and impact the next negotiations positively. The sequencing not only helps build a stronger negotiation leverage for yourself, it should at the same time weaken the negotiation position of the opposing parties.

To illustrate, we briefly describe below some strategies that can benefit from the relationship mapping tool.

"BOOTSTRAPPING"

This strategy moves from "easier" parties to "harder" ones, exploiting different relationship patterns (deference, influence, etc.). Try to create momentum for acceptance of your proposal by aligning the "easier" parties by your side and strengthening your coalition until the point that the "harder" parties either feel more comfortable or have no choice but to commit to your proposal. The "easier" parties are usually your natural allies or people that defer to you. The "harder" ones tend to be further away in terms of being influenced by you or in antagonizing you.

"BACKWARD MAPPING"

This calls for you to work back from needed decisionmakers to yourself, exploiting overall relationship patterns. Analyze to whom the decision-maker (who you want to influence) defers and then to whom this person defers; repeat this process until you can find a connection to yourself. Then start influencing these people in sequence until you reach and influence the desired individual(s).

Pay attention not only to individual relationship patterns, but also to the joint value that your coalition might have on influencing the final decision making process.

"PYRAMIDING"

Pyramiding is a strategy that initiates from the "hardest" and most impactful parties downward to other parties. Sometimes it may be a good strategy to build your coalition initially, with a few from the "hardest" parties. This strategy allows you to ally yourself with parties that have so much influential power over the others that once you have them on your side, you are almost assured that you will have no opposition. While this strategy may be riskier than the preceding ones, it might save you time and effort after you manage to get some of the "hardest" parties in your coalition.

CONCLUSION

On a tactical level, there are certain issues that one should pay attention to when building a relationship map. Sequencing helps you conceal or reveal information. Since some coalitions can only be made publicly, it is good to take this into consideration when sequencing different parties on your map. As the confidentiality of coalition-building can be one of the important tools for achieving success, you want to consider how to manage general and specific information regarding building a coalition around a proposal. Often it is important that your opposition not know that you are preparing a coalition around a subject.

Moreover, it is a wise idea to determine ahead of time if you are building a coalition to promote or oppose a proposal. The importance of this is that the strategy of coalition-building and the way you prepare and emphasize your relationship mapping will differ. You can profit from knowing if you want to sequence negotiations to create a supporting coalition that best serves your interests, or to sequence negotiations to block or break down coalitions that undermine your interests.

Another issue to be aware of is the internal and external negotiations that go on around coalition-building. Sometimes you need to build a strong internal consensus before negotiating externally. ("Internal" can mean simply inside an organization or among a group of related organizations.) At other times, it may be a better strategy to build external coalitions in order to pressure internal opponents towards your objective.

Finally, regarding the negotiation element of relationship mapping (on which the relationship-mapping tool relies), whenever you apply this tool you are trying to further your negotiation goals and to enhance your chance of doing so through alliances and coalitions. This tool will be even more valuable if you have as many productive working relationships as possible with the people or institutions involved in the negotiations. The more productive working relationships you have with the parties in your negotiation, the higher the chances you will successfully implement your relationship-mapping. The presence of productive working relationships prevents you from having to use the relationship in ways that may harm both your relationships and your personal image with the various parties. To build productive working relationships, ones where people trust you, will make it easier for them to trust your ideas and build coalitions with you.

1. BATNA is the acronym for the phrase "Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement". Alternatives are the walk-away possibilities that each party has *if an agreement is not reached*. In general, neither party should agree to something that is worse than its BATNA.

2. Sebenius, James K. "Sequencing To Build Coalitions: With Whom Should I Talk First?" September 1994, unpublished.

3. There will be tension between how many relationship patterns you may want to include in the model. On the one hand, you may generate more accurate information from your mapping if you add more specific relationships; on the other hand, your mapping will gain complexity and may become harder to interpret and analyze. The important thing is to build a relationship map with as many specific patterns as you can effectively and efficiently handle.